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June 26, 1991

NEW YORK POST

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Carol Iannone's ordeal

In early July, the Senate Labor and Human Resources Committee will take a vote of historic significance. Oddly, given the committee's general purview, the issue at hand isn't a sweeping piece of collective-bargaining legislation or anything of that sort.

Still, the vote will turn on a central American value — freedom of expression.

As often happens in the American national experience, this issue presents itself in a relatively benign form. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Chairwoman Lynne Cheney has nominated NYU Professor Carol Iannone to one of the 26 slots on the NEH's advisory council.

As a literary critic and a leader of the National Association of Scholars, Iannone has played a key role in fighting the "political correctness" movement now entrenched on many of the nation's campuses. She has written on a range of literary topics — with a breadth that puts most narrowly focused literary professors to shame. And Iannone has often bucked the tide, manifesting a veritable allergy to conventional wisdom.

Demonstrating striking intellectual courage — witness the opposition to her appointment — Professor Iannone has mocked feminist scholarship and has even noted a growing tendency to award literary prizes on the basis of race and ethnicity rather than achievement.

To venture the suggestion that, say, Pulitzer Prizes have become a mode of reparations isn't a path to peer-group popularity. And, in fact, Iannone has en-

raged the highly politicized Modern Language Association and other left-liberal groups.

Iannone has been slandered (always anonymously) as a "racist." And it's been suggested that she lacks sufficiently "distinguished" academic credentials.

The former charge is hurled with such frequency these days — against everyone and anyone — that it's almost devoid of meaning. As for her level of distinction, the quality of a scholar's work will always remain a somewhat subjective proposition. But literary criticism need not be an entirely impenetrable realm.

What if the senators on the Labor and Human Resources Committee actually took out half an hour to read Iannone's essay on the Brett Easton Ellis affair in the current issue of *Commentary* magazine before they voted? What if they then compared this piece to *anything* written by *any* officer of the Modern Language Association in the past five years? We'd guess they'd likely conclude that Carol Iannone is plenty "distinguished" — both in general, and especially for the post to which she's been nominated.

The bottom-line point here is that none of the senators need share Carol Iannone's sometimes provocative views. (Much of her work, it should be noted, betrays a decidedly mainstream sensibility.) They need only endorse her right to hold them — in the face of the the insidious campaign, informed by smear and innuendo, that's been waged against her.